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Maine Fire Marshal News, June 2010

Maine Office of State Fire Marshal

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PREVENTION * LAW ENFORCEMENT * RESEARCH

Maine Fire Marshal News

Maine State Fire Marshal's Office • Fire Research
Maine Department of Public Safety
Fire Marshal's Web Page

June 2010

Spring/Summer 2010 Vol. 2, Issue No. 6

WELCOME!

Welcome to another issue of the Maine Fire Marshal News. Please take some time to read the newsletter and send us your own article for a future publication or comments in general. As always, we do appreciate the feedback on the newsletter many of you have sent over the past few years and look forward to hearing from you more in the future.



A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

What a beautiful spring we've had so far. Hopefully the summer will be as nice. This time of year I like to talk about summer related fire prevention and safety issues.

Just as I was thinking about this topic I received bad news about a fire injury related to an open burn. Every year we see people using accelerants to burn brush! It's so unnecessary and dangerous. When you burn brush, burn it far away from any structure and have a charged hose with buckets of water ready in the event the fire begins to spread.

It's extremely important as well to have a shovel and rake at hand to tend to the fire as needed and always check to make sure the conditions are right for burning brush. Needless to say, **NEVER USE GAS** or any other accelerant to start the fire. Roll up newspaper or use a log manufactured to start a fireplace fire to start your brush fire. Finally, keep children away from the fire and have another adult with you throughout the burn. Maine's Forest Service and your local fire department provide the required permits for such a burn and along with the application you'll receive additional information on having a safe burn that can be helpful.

I love to cook indoors and outdoors and appreciate grilled foods as much as anyone but I always grill away from the house. In fact, I grill away from the rails of the deck or any other combustible material and keep children out of the area. It's important to keep your gas grill clean and in good operating condition. Whether you use a gas or charcoal-fired grill never use accelerants other than those such as charcoal fluid which are specifically manufactured for that purpose.

Summer is also the time in which we unfortunately see fireworks related injuries. Two years ago the Fire Marshal's Office collected as much data as we could on fireworks related fires and injuries from 29 states around the country. We took into account the states population to be fair, how prohibitive their current laws are with regard to consumer

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fireworks, and ranked incidents per 1,000 residents for both fires and injuries. The ranking of fires appears to confirm the hypothesis that the more available the product, the more likely you will see and increase in fireworks related fires. With that in mind be aware that consumer fireworks are not legal in



Maine. They can and do cause injuries and have even resulted in fatalities. In an instant some consumer fireworks can result in the

loss of a finger or an eye. We like to tell people to leave the fireworks to the licensed pros.

On behalf of the entire staff here at the Fire Marshal's Office let me wish you and yours a safe and fun summer season.

Sincerely,

John C. Dean
Fire Marshal

NFPA ANNOUNCES 2010 FIRE PREVENTION WEEK THEME

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

The National Fire Protection Association's official theme for the 2010 Fire Prevention Week is *Smoke Alarms: A sound you can live with*. The focus will be on educating people about smoke alarms in addition to taking essential steps to upgrade and maintain these critical early warning systems.

As always the NFPA is offering an abundance of pre-packaged educational tools for targeted for the fire service, school teachers, families and children. For the fire service the NFPA is providing strategies to plan for Fire

Prevention Week months in advance. In addition a lot of information about smoke alarms, their effectiveness and details about new options such as wireless interconnected smoke detectors may be obtained.

Recent surveys on smoke detector use in Maine are encouraging. Surveys suggest most Maine residents, 90 percent plus, indicate they have working smoke detectors in their homes in contrast to about 50 percent who have carbon monoxide detectors. More detailed analysis reveal disturbing and long recognized patterns in the data. For instance, people with higher incomes are more likely to have detectors than are those with lower incomes. Middle and upper age groups are more likely to have the detectors than younger adults who, ironically, are also more likely to have children.

Beneath the analyses too is the maximum vs. minimum protection question. We don't know from study

responses how many people who have detectors only have one in the

home (minimum protection) as opposed to those with a detector in all bedrooms, in the area giving access to the bedrooms and on each level of the building (maximum protection). In addition we don't know how many have interconnected alarms which is another feature of maximum protection.

"This question regarding minimum vs. maximum protection is what makes this Fire Prevention Week theme so important."

This question regarding minimum vs. maximum protection is what makes this Fire Prevention Week theme so important. It's time to stress more than merely having alarms in all homes, but rather having working interconnected alarms in all bedrooms, in the hallway, and on each level of the building. This is our opportunity to stress the importance of updating to maximum protection!



<http://www.smokefreeforme.org/>

MAINE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE RECEIVES 2009 FIRE PREVENTION & SAFETY GRANT

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

The Maine State Fire Marshal's Office has received a Fire Prevention and Safety Grant from FEMA/DHS in the amount of \$119,549.

The grant funds will be used to develop four radio and television fire safety and prevention related public service announcements to be aired throughout Maine. The Fire Marshal's Office is working with the Maine Association of Broadcasters to produce and place the announcements that will run through to the spring of 2011. In addition to producing and running the announcement there will also be a poll taken of Maine citizens designed to ascertain the effect the announcements have in augmenting their awareness of fire safety and prevention issues.

Because it is so difficult to reach people in Maine's remote areas the idea of a major public awareness campaign was considered and developed as the basic idea in requesting funding this year. In addition to Maine's sparsely populated areas, many older adults live in these areas and watch television. It is hoped the radio and television spots reach them and other segments of Maine's population with these important messages.

The announcements will focus on summer fire issues, planning an escape, smoke and CO alarms, as well as winter fire issues. The first of the radio announcements should be airing this month as should those to be run on TV.



www.homefiresprinkler.org

MAINE ATTORNEY GENERALS DEATH INVESTIGATION PROTOCOL

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

As is known, the Attorney General is charged with the investigation of all homicides and suspicious deaths occurring in Maine. They have written a protocol covering the death scene control in addition to procedures to follow in cases involving deaths. Among the types of deaths outlined are those referred to as "*special circumstance*" which include fire and explosion deaths.

Maine's law enforcement and fire service personnel have done an exemplary job in following the Attorney General's protocol in fire death scene situations. The protocol for these situations states that the "*State Fire Marshal is designated the official representative of the Attorney General in the investigation of fatal fires and explosions. The law enforcement officer or firefighter discovering a body in a fire or following an explosion shall notify the Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. The scene shall not be disturbed or the body moved, unless the body is in immediate danger of destruction or further damage. If arson is suspected or the death is otherwise suspicious, the case should be handled as any other suspicious death, which includes notifying the Criminal Investigation Division.*"

The protocol refers readers to procedures to follow in a variety of death scene scenarios. These procedures include start-up investigative procedures, i.e. conducting a cursory search of premises, not disturbing the body, and notification of critical officials. In the case of fire deaths, the vast majority of which are not suspicious, the Fire Marshal's Office appreciates Maine's law enforcement and fire service personnel for their strict adherence to the many elements of this protocol. Following the protocol facilitates the collection of information about the incident which helps us in learning more about how we might prevent such incidents from happening again.

MEFIRS – Maine Fire Incident Reporting System

	Current Statistics 2009*	Final Statistics for 2008
Total Calls:	70,683	71,667
Fire Calls:	3,579	3,531**
EMS Calls:	50,371	43,086
All others:	21,733	23,815
Fire Departments Reporting	186	181
Total Fire Dollar Loss	\$34,282,871	\$31,163,227
Civilian Fire Related Injuries	38	42
Fire Service Fire Related Injuries	32	22
Civilian Fire Related Deaths	14***	14
Fire Service Fire Related Deaths	1***	0

* The Fire Marshal's Office will have all data for 2009 in by June-July of 2010.

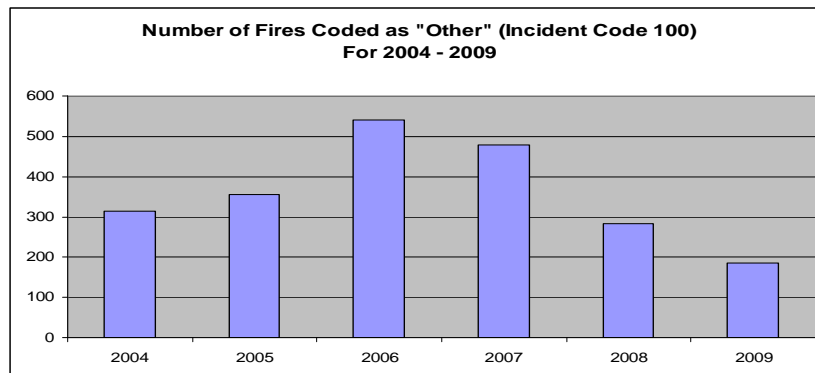
** Represents single incidents only.

*** Based on SFMO Investigations

This will be the last time you see the 2008 and updated 2009 data sets. Beginning with the next issue we'll begin tracking 2010 data sets and comparing it to 2009. With that said take a look at, compare and contrast, these very basic distributions of fires, EMS, and "other" incidents (calls) along with the dollar loss, fatality and injury numbers.

There are a number of observations we can make from looking at the data. First, the total number of calls declined while the number of fire and EMS calls increased and all others decreased. Obviously we'd like to see the number of fire and EMS calls diminish though summary numbers such as these do not tell us a great deal about severity of call, loss or costs associated with the calls. We also had fewer civilian related fire injuries reported but saw an increase in the number of firefighter fire injuries. Civilian fire deaths remained the same however we lost a firefighter. Again, these numbers we don't like to see.

The decline in all other calls is interesting. The "All others" group includes incident codes 100 (fires the department couldn't fit into an incident type category) and 140-173 which are, simply stated, outdoor fires. The 100 code group is problematic in that it is meaningless. We hope Maine Fire Departments will refrain from using this code or call us at 626-3870 for assistance in identifying the proper code. The graph below indicates Maine's fire service is doing well in reducing the use of the 100 code but can still improve.



As always we encourage you to get more and more departments to provide data so that we can gain a more accurate picture of Maine's fire burden.

"Fight Fire with Facts"

FIREWORKS IN MAINE

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

Being near July 4th I thought it'd be appropriate to summarize again the dangers fireworks pose to Maine citizens and visitors alike. Despite being illegal in Maine, we need to be mindful that fireworks are available just across the border as the picture below illustrates.



This assortment of Fireworks was seized coming into Maine from NH.

In addition to contributing to a demonstrable increase in fires around the July 4th holiday, fireworks injure many people as well. The most frequent recipient of these injuries are children. The very population who is not, according to “manufacture’s instructions” supposed to be using them! Let’s look at some fresh numbers in from the National Fire Protection Association and Consumer Products Safety Commission.

- 30,100 – The average number of fires caused by fireworks each year
- 7,000 – Estimated number of injuries caused by fireworks in 2006 (70% of these occurred between June 20 and July 20)
- 7 – Number of fireworks related deaths
- \$34 million – Amount of direct property loss due to fireworks

In opposing legislation to legalize fireworks in Maine recently, the Fire Marshal’s Office examined data from states that allow all kinds of consumer fireworks along with those that allowed only a few types. The data clearly revealed that “availability” is the key to a higher frequency of fireworks related catastrophes. Simply stated, states that allowed the sale of consumer fireworks experienced more injuries, deaths, and fires both in count and as a rate of the population. These numbers defeated a similar effort in Vermont to legalized fireworks recently.

MAINE FIREWATCH

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

The following fires occurred in Maine since this newsletter was last published in February of 2010.

A motel in South Portland was subject to an explosion and fire when a propane heater being used as supplemental heat inside one of the units exploded. The use of unvented fuel fired heaters indoors not only pose a fire hazard but a carbon monoxide hazard as well and should be avoided if possible.



In fact it is against the Maine Fire Code to use unvented devices such as this indoors.

The day after this South Portland fire another fire destroyed a garage and several vehicles before spreading to a nearby home in Buckfield. The origin and cause of this fire was, again, and explosion. Despite being an intense fire no one was injured. (see photo below)



In Harrington a truck driver delivering medical supplies crashed into a gas pump setting off yet another explosion. In this case the driver was injured but lucky to be alive. He owes his life to some bystanders who pulled him from the burning vehicle as the flames surrounded them.

Four men helped the driver from the vehicle and then called emergency personnel to the scene. The fire was an unfortunate accident. The photo below shows some of the bystanders assisting the driver after removing him from the vehicle.



Photo by Edwin Barkdoll

Another vehicle fire, at a gas station, took place this past April. Though the truck burned several feet away from the pumps the flash from the fire still initiated the UV/IR (ultraviolet/infrared) sensors and set of the pumps automatic suppression system. (see photo below)



Automatic suppression systems such as that shown discharging above are required in all retail gasoline dispensing stations built within the last several years. Most larger chains have

been using them for a much longer period to protect their investment and avoid losses due to legal claims that might result from a bad fire at a commercial facility.

During the weekend of May 21st, Maine Fire Marshal's Investigators investigated five fires including one involving brush burning. In this case an individual using gasoline to start the fire ended up burning herself but did not sustain life threatening injuries. On a sadder note, since last edition three Maine citizens were killed in fires in Sanford, Augusta, and Stonington, Maine. So far this year there have been four fire fatalities.



Would you let your child play with fire?

Every year thousands of Americans, mostly children, are hurt by consumer fireworks such as sparklers and firecrackers. Many are burned, scarred or disfigured by fireworks that are legal, but still very dangerous and cause fires. This year, an alliance of health and safety advocates asks you to keep fireworks from hurting your family. The risk is too great.

Leave fireworks to the professionals.

National Fire Protection Association along with: American Academy of Family Physicians • American Academy of Ophthalmology • American Academy of Pediatrics • American Association for Hand Surgery • American Association of Public Health Physicians • American Burn Association • American College of Emergency Physicians • American Society of Plastic Surgeons • Emergency Nurses Association • Fire Department Safety Officers Association • International Association of Arson Investigators • International Association of Fire Chiefs • International Association of Fire Fighters • International Fire Marshals Association • Metropolitan Fire Chiefs • National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners • National Association of School Nurses • National Association of State Fire Marshals • National Volunteer Fire Council • Prevent Blindness America



American Society for Testing and Materials is founded,
Philadelphia (PA), 1898
Hotel Vendome fire kills 9 firefighters, Boston (MA), 1972

UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

If you have an announcement or upcoming event you'd like to post in this newsletter please feel free to forward it to us using the contact information below. The next issue will be in September 2010.

WATCH THAT GRILL!

By Lori L. Gunn, Deputy Editor

In addition to the Fire Marshals' Message, grills, hibachis and barbecues on residential properties continue to be a high fire risk and, on average, result in more injuries. Over half (57) percent of grill fires on residential properties occur in the 4 months of May, June, July and August.

Thirty two percent of grill fires in residential properties start on patios, terraces, screened-in porches, or courtyards. While an additional 24 percent start on exterior balconies and unclosed porches. As a result it is crucial that each household diligently practice fire safety when cooking on one of these pieces of equipment. Practicing fire safety can prevent these fires and their resultant injuries, deaths and property loss.

Have a happy and safe summer!

For additional information go to:

http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/all_citizens/home_fire_prev/cooking.shtml

For a full report:

<http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/tfrs/v11i1.pdf>

This Month in Fire History

LaSalle Hotel fire kills 61, Chicago (IL), 1946
Ellington Apartments fire kills 13, Cleveland (OH), 1932
Metal mine fire kills 163, Butte (MT), 1917
SS General Slocum steamship fire kills 1,030, New York (NY), 1904.



The *Maine Fire Marshal News* is an electronic publication of the Maine State Fire Marshal's Office.

Editors: Richard E. Taylor & Lori L. Gunn

To submit articles for publication contact the Fire Marshal's Office at (207) 626-3870 and ask to speak with the editors. You may also e-mail an article or comment to Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov

All articles are subject to an editorial staff review prior to inclusion. For a copy of submission requirements contact the editorial staff.

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